

Keeping His Word

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[0 : 00] What a text. I can see from your faces you've been waiting all week to hear that text read. Right? Not.

I have to confess that although I believe every part of Scripture to be the living Word of the living God, when I'm reading the Bible and come across a genealogy, I just want to skip it and get on to the good stuff.

In my more duty-bound moments, I will at least speed-read the genealogy to get on to the good stuff. Surprisingly, when we understand what biblical genealogies are doing, they are good stuff.

Let us pray. Spirit of the living God, we believe that you inspired this part of Scripture also.

And so in your mercy and grace, will you help us understand why? And help us enter into the news you want to declare through it.

[1 : 13] We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Now, if you have read the Bible widely, you know that this is not the only genealogy inspired by the Spirit of God.

We find a number of such genealogies in Genesis 1 to 11, in chapter 4, chapter 10, chapter 11. We find more of them in the rest of Genesis, chapter 25, 35, 36, 46.

The first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles are one long genealogy. Matthew begins his gospel, his telling of the story of Jesus with a genealogy.

Luke follows his telling of Jesus' baptism with yet a different genealogy. In texts like Genesis 5, we have a unique genre, a unique literary type or structure.

In the Bible, we have poetry, like the Song of Creation in Genesis 1 and the Psalms in the Song of Solomon. We have what I've been calling pictographs, like Genesis 2 and 3.

[2 : 22] In the Bible, we have historical documents, the Samuels, the Kings, and the Book of Acts. We have wisdom sayings, like Proverbs and James. We have prophecy, like Isaiah and Micah and Amos.

We have the Gospels, a very unique literary genre, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We have the parables, through which Jesus opens up the meaning of the kingdom of God. We have the epistles, Romans, Ephesians, and Hebrews.

And we have apocalyptic, my favorite genre of all, Daniel, and the most exquisitely crafted book in human history, the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

And we have genealogies. Now, read through all the genealogies in the Bible, and you discover that each of them is slightly different.

Not only, of course, because they have different names, but because they are assembled in different ways. Some are in a simple, A gives birth to B, who gives birth to C, who gives birth to D.

[3 : 26] Some are in the form, A gives birth to B, B gives birth to C, C gives birth to D. Some, periodically, will add a comment. This is especially so in 1 Chronicles 1-9.

Comments like, Now Jabez called on the God of Israel, and God granted him what he requested. Some of them simply list names. Some play it forward.

A, father of B, B, father of C, C, father of D. They begin with the originator of the line, then move on to the son and to the grandson, and so on. Some play it backwards.

D, son of C, C, son of B, B, son of A. They begin with the last person, and trace backward through the line, through the parent, the grandparent, to the originator of the line.

So Matthew, for instance, plays Jesus' genealogy forward. He begins with Abraham, goes through David, and gets to Jesus. Luke plays Jesus' genealogy backward.

[4 : 28] He begins with Jesus, and goes all the way back through David, through Abraham, through Noah, through Adam, and all the way to God. Now, although the genealogies give these names in chronological order, they are not necessarily giving strict chronology.

A, son of B. The phrase can mean, A is literally the son of B. But it can also mean, A is an ancestor of B. And between A and B, there may be other literal sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters.

That is, genealogies can skip generations. Many generations. For example, in Ezra, we read, Azariah, son of Merah-ioth.

Now, in 1 Chronicles, we learn that there are six generations between this Azariah and this Merah-ioth. Matthew says, Joram begat Uziah.

But in 2 Kings, we learn that Joram begat Azariah, who begat Joaz, who begat Amaziah, who begat Uziah. All the genealogies give the name in chronological order, but the genealogies are not necessarily giving strict, continuous chronology.

[5 : 52] Which means, in particular, that we cannot add up all the ages we have in Genesis 5 and work backwards to the date of Adam's birth.

You know the name Bishop Usher, a gifted scholar in his day, 1614, and historian of some renown. He assumed there was this strict chronology and then used Genesis 5 to argue then that the date of creation is October 23rd, 4004 B.C.

Maybe. Maybe not. Genealogies alone cannot be used to substantiate that kind of conclusion because they can skip generations.

Now, two things all the biblical genealogies teach us. The nature of history and the value of individuals. All the genealogies in the Bible teach us the nature of history.

History moves. History is not the endless repetition of the same pattern. History is not cyclical. And this is the unique contribution that the Judeo-Christian faith makes to the human understanding of time.

[7 : 06] History moves. It moves forward. Sometimes down. Sometimes up. Sometimes to the left. Sometimes to the right. But it moves forward. History is moving somewhere.

Now, that is really good news for people caught in religious philosophies of monotonous repetition. It's also good news for people who view history as a conveyor belt of corpses.

History is linear, not cyclical, and not stuck in meaninglessness. And all the biblical genealogies teach us the value of individuals.

History is not just driven by great ideas. It's driven by great ideas that are embodied in individuals who think, who make choices, who act out their ideologies in real time with real people in real communities.

The God of history values individuals. Indeed, the genealogies declare that God remembers. God remembers individuals.

[8 : 09] God remembers names. People matter. Names matter. Our names matter. We count in the unfolding of history, which is why it is appropriate for cultures to stop and have remembrance days.

Now, God's regard for names exacerbates a distress that I am currently experiencing.

It's a horrible distress, and it is that I'm having trouble remembering names. I used to be so good at it.

I could hear a person's name once or twice at the most, and I would remember it when I was being interviewed for the pastor of Union Church of Manila in 1985. I met with the women's fellowship.

There were 32 women from different parts of the world, and some of them had Thai names, if you've seen Thai names, and other kinds of names, and they went around and gave their name and where they were from, and then one of the women says, Okay, hot shot young pastor, tell us our names and where we're from.

[9 : 13] I prayed, and I went around, and I gave every single person's name and where they were from, and that's the last time I've been able to do it.

Now I need to hear a person's name two, three, four, five times, and still I don't get it. And this distresses me. It matters that I'm not remembering names because you matter. I'm jealous of Ken Shigematsu.

He's the senior minister of 10th Avenue Alliance Church. Ken can remember your name, your spouse's name, and your children's name hearing your name once. The genealogies tell us God remembers.

He remembers our names. Indeed, he has a book in which he writes all the names down of those he claims for himself. It's called the Lamb's Book of Life.

Your name, my name, may never appear in the who's who's of the 21st century. No matter. Because what matters is if your name is in the book, in God's who's who.

[10 : 26] So all the biblical genealogies help us make sense of our stories by teaching us that history has meaning, it's linear, not cyclical, and that individuals matter.

Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Methuselah, whoever they were, whatever they did, matter. And so do Sally, and Hosea, and Magdalena, and Hosein, and Ingrid, and Klaus, and you, and me.

Okay. So what does the genealogy in Genesis 5 uniquely teach us? How does this chapter of the story that makes sense of our stories make sense of our stories?

keeping His word. If I could give a title to this chapter of Genesis, to the genealogy in Genesis 5, it would be keeping His word.

God, the creator and redeemer, the God of justice and mercy is keeping His word. That's what this is about. We see and hear this in four terms the author of the genealogy uses.

[11 : 33] The four terms are begat, died, rest, and took. Begat, died, rest, and took.

First term, begat. The version that we've read from today uses the longer phrase became the father of. The Hebrew uses a single word, a dynamic word, a verb, begat.

He begat, and He begat, and He begat, and He begat, nine times, He begat. The point? It's huge. God is keeping His first creative word.

This is why the genealogy begins the way it does. Chapter 5, verses 1 to 2. This is the book of the generations of Adam. And then, in the day when God created Adam, He made him in His likeness, created them male and female, and blessed them, and named them man in the day they were created.

Now, where have we heard those words before? Likeness, male and female, and blessed? In Genesis 1. The genealogy of Genesis 3 is returning to Genesis 1 to the place where God began the flow of history.

[12 : 47] The genealogy is restating this original creative word. Although the sad, dark story of Genesis 4, the story of Cain, the murderer, begins to put a cloud over everything, Genesis 5 takes us back to the beginning.

Back to the place where God makes His decision to create creatures in His likeness. The point being, God is not going to give up. No Cain, Tulemic line like we have in Genesis 4 is going to thwart God's desire to have creatures in His image in His world.

He blessed them, it says. Echoing the original, God blessed them and said, be fruitful and multiply. And they did. In spite of sin, humans kept giving birth to more humans.

They multiplied and still do. Male and female He created them with the capacity to be fruitful and to multiply. God is going to have His way. male and female alive together in His likeness in the world.

Begat, begat, begat, begat. Not only keeping the original creative word, but also keeping the original redemptive word.

[14 : 05] The word spoken in the garden that had become a cemetery. To the serpent who had twisted God's word to raise the suspicion about God's nature and character, God says, I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed.

He will bruise you on the head and you will bruise him on the heel. Begat, begat, begat, begat because God is keeping His word about bringing into being this seed of the woman who is going to crush the head of evil.

In Genesis 4, it becomes clear that the firstborn child of humans, Cain, is not the seed. If anything, Cain is dangerously becoming the seed of the serpent.

Lamech, his ancestor, clearly is in the serpent's camp. Begat, begat, begat, begat, begat. As monotonous as that is, it's saying God is going to make sure the seed is born.

Am I making sense? The second term where we hear and see God keeping His word died. In the genealogy of Genesis 5, we have the sober refrain, and He died, and He died, and He died, and He died eight times, and He died.

[15 : 20] The point, God is keeping the original word of judgment. In the only command God ever gave humanity in the garden, God said, you will surely die.

Of the trees of the garden, you may eat freely, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you will surely die. And they did, and so did all their offspring.

Died, died, died. God is keeping His word. No other text in Scripture puts this so forcefully. This tells us that God means business.

The living God is not like a parent who indulges the child with idle threats. God said, in the day that we declare independence from Him, we will not be able to make life work on our own.

We would die, and we did, and we do. But we were not supposed to. When God created human beings, they were not supposed to die.

[16 : 28] Which is the point of the large numbers in the genealogy, the long years people lived. It's hard to get our mind around these numbers, isn't it? I know.

Adam, 930 years. Seth, 912. Enosh, 905. Kenan, 910. Methuselah, 969. Lemeck, 770.

Noah, 950. They lived so many years because they were originally created to live a long time, like forever.

Again, I know that's hard to understand. It's hard to imagine. I know. The whole idea just raises all kinds of questions. I know that. But this text is telling us that death was not supposed to be.

This is the unique thing that Genesis 3 brings to the table as we try to understand human existence. We were not supposed to die. Whether the numbers in the genealogy are literal or symbolic or both, the point is we were not supposed to die.

[17 : 36] In Genesis 11, after the flood, the genealogy will have smaller numbers showing that slowly but surely God's word is being actualized.

Shem, the son of Noah, lives 600 years. Peleg, 230. Nahor, 148. You shall surely die.

And he died and he died and he died and he died. Depressing, I know. But the genealogy does not want us to live in a make-believe world. The genealogy wants us to face the reality of judgment.

Yes, death is not going to win in the end, which we'll discover in a moment, but death is where we now live. So, Psalm 90, attributed to Moses, verses 1 and 2.

Lord, you've been our dwelling place in all generations before the mountains were born or you gave birth to the earth and the world even from everlasting to everlasting you are God. And then verses 3 and 7.

[18 : 37] You have turned man back into dust. You say, Return, O child of the humans, for we have been consumed by your anger and by your wrath we have been terrified.

Indeed, all of humanity under the righteous wrath of God, we all die as God said we would.

So, Jonathan Edwards, the great theologian pastor of the 18th century, regularly contemplated the reality of death. In 1722, while he was living in New York when he was only 19 years old, he set out a number of resolutions.

He read these resolutions every week the rest of his life. He realized he couldn't keep these resolutions apart from the grace of God. So this was not mere self-help. It was a recognition he would need God to help him do this.

Resolutions like resolved to live with all my might while I do live. Resolved to never do anything out of revenge because he knew that vengeance would kill him.

[19 : 52] Resolved to examine carefully and constantly what that one thing is in me which causes me to doubt the love of God and so direct all my forces against it.

Boy, I like that one. Resolved never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life. And then one written years after the others, Edwards says, I frequently hear persons in old age say how they would live if they were to live their lives over again.

Resolved that I will live just so as I think I shall wish I had done. Supposing I live to old age. And then this. Resolved to think much on all occasions of my dying and of the common circumstances which attend death.

Every week to think much of dying. Morbid? No. Facing reality. Edwards knew how fragile life is and he did not want to live naively.

He didn't want to live in denial. We all die. And when we truly face that fact we live differently. We live simply. We live gratefully.

[21 : 11] We live generously. And he died and he died and he died. It's right to lament the fact of death because it wasn't supposed to be.

And it's right to protest the fact of death because it wasn't supposed to be. Jesus weeping at Lazarus' tomb I think is Jesus' way of saying this ought not be.

And Genesis 5 is reminding us that death is and he died and he died and he died because we humans did not believe God when he said if you try to live apart from me you will die.

He died he died he died he died God keeping his word. A third term rest. Lamech calls his son Noah for verse 29 this one shall give us rest.

This one shall rest us from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the Lord God cursed. Now how Lamech knew this we do not know. The Lamech of the Cain line in Genesis 4 accepts the fact of violence as normal and celebrates it.

[22 : 21] But the Lamech of the Ceph line in Genesis 5 understands that sin has had these horrible consequences there is this curse and he longs to be freed from it.

Now where have we heard that word rest before? In the song of creation where God establishes the seventh day the day of rest.

Do you see what Lamech sees? God is going to have his way. God is going to bring us into the seventh day. God has something to give us on the seventh day that he does not give us on the other six days.

And God is going to have his way. He's going to bring us into this rest freed from the curse. Noah this is the one who will give us rest.

Well not exactly. Lamech here is illustrating the nature of the prophetic word. He sees the ultimate end but he doesn't see how we're going to get to the end.

[23 : 24] The way I like to put it is prophets always hit the target but they seldom get the bullseye. They get on the target but it takes a long time to get to the bullseye.

The target someone will give us rest. The bullseye not Noah. Yes after the flood creation is reinvigorated but Noah does not bring this rest this freedom from the curse.

A son of Noah will do that. Noah as righteous a man as he will be is not yet this seed of the woman. That seed had not yet come and it would not come for a while but when he comes he will say to us come to me all who are weary and have overburdened yourselves and I will rest you.

But Lamech does somehow see and the genealogy of Genesis 5 preaches that God is going to keep his word about the seventh day. God will give us rest from the consequences of human sin.

Which brings us to the fourth term in which we see and hear God keeping his word took. The pattern he died he died he died he died he died he died he died he died is broken by the startling declaration he was not for God took him.

[24 : 50] Verse 24 and Enoch walked with God and he was not for God took him. This is an amazing text. Better yet it's an unbelievable text.

This too is hard to get our minds around. I know Enoch does not die Enoch does not have to go through the process of dying he's taken by God taken into the eternal realm without having to go through the grave as the prophet Elijah would be years later.

Why is Enoch spared and he died? The text says he walked with God twice. He walked with God meaning I think in a unique way in a deeply intimate way all the time every day and every event he walked with God.

In this world that was seeking to operate without any reference to God Enoch walked with God. As God calls all those whom he claims for himself to do Micah 6 8 he's told you oh man what is good and what the Lord requires of you but to do justice and love mercy and walk humbly with your God.

The apostle Paul will reiterate this call therefore I entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called. Walk in love walk as children of light walk by the spirit and you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh.

[26 : 25] Enoch walked with God and God took him. Later Jewish documents would go to extreme lengths speculating about all of this but the genealogy in Genesis 5 only says he was not and God took him.

Lucky bum. God chose to spare Enoch the pain of death to show us that death will not win.

He died he died he died he died and then right in the middle of this genealogy and he was not and God took him. As Madeline L'Engle puts it already God is trampling on death telling us that death is not going to have the last word.

God is keeping his word. God created us for fellowship. God created us to enter into the life he has. God created us to enter into his own inner life as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and God is going to have his way and Enoch is exhibit A.

Death will not have the last word over those who seek to walk with the God of life. For the seed of the woman is going to come begat, begat, begat, begat and he will overcome the power of death.

[27 : 51] But here's the mystery. He will not like Enoch be spared death. He will not like Enoch be taken.

Instead, the seed of the woman is going to walk right into the face of death, into the jaws of death, into the mouth of death, and let death have its full way with him. And in so doing, he's going to deal death, a death blow.

Matthew, at the end of the gospel which begins with a genealogy, tells us that in the moment Jesus dies, look, the curtain in the temple is torn in two from top to bottom, the earth shook, the rocks split, and the graves were opened.

The graves were opened. As he dies, the graves were opened. In the moment, the seed of the woman dies, death loses its grip, its finality, and has to let the dead go.

He defeats death by dying. That's why I never tire repeating what a mentor of mine never tired repeating. When death stung Jesus Christ, it stung itself to death, and the tombs were opened.

[29 : 22] As the speaker told 11,000 young people Friday night at the Rogers Arena, Jesus Christ did not come into the world to make bad people good.

He came into the world to make dead people alive. And so, the Apostle Paul, who knew the genealogies of Genesis, can say in 1 Corinthians 15, For since by a man came death, so also by a man came the resurrection of the dead.

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ the new Adam shall all be made alive. Paul goes on to say what the Genesis text is leading us toward.

Look, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep. We shall be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. When this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and when this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying, death is swallowed up in victory.

[30 : 42] O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, keeping his word. In the seat of the woman, the new Adam, God is keeping his word.

Amen.